DISTRO**HOPPER**

We've tapped GCHQ's communications to find out what's going on in distro land.
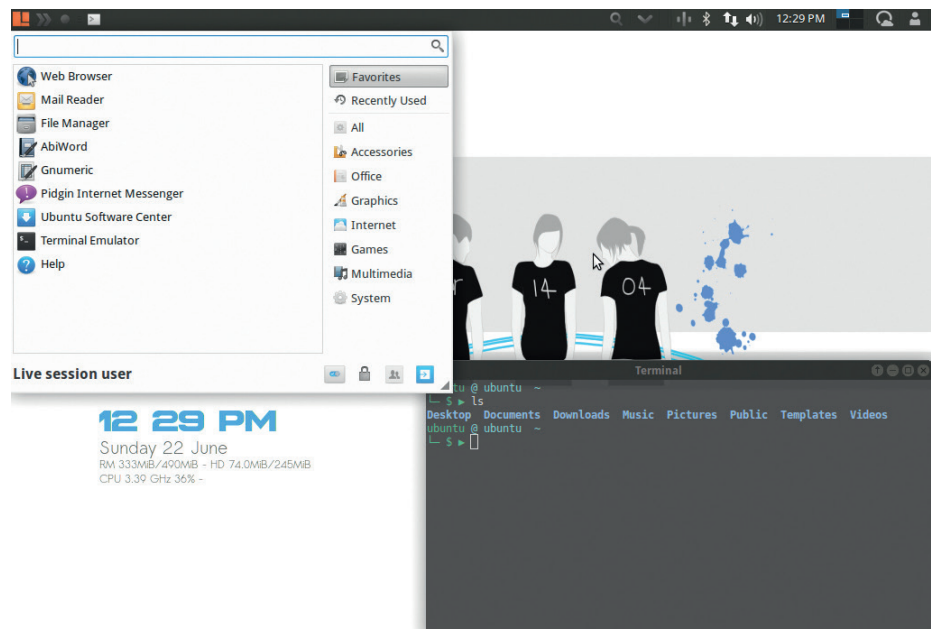
Voyager 14.04

Xfce, your time has come.

Xfce is a great desktop environment, but up until now we've associated it more with function than style. It does what we want and doesn't burn through too many system resources. After trying out Voyager 14.04 though, we might have to rethink that classification. It comes with a vibrant white and blue theme, and a good set of icons and artwork. As you may have guessed, Voyager is based on Xubuntu 14.04, which is an LTS release, has all the software you'd expect from a *buntu, and should get all the security updates as well.

The project has a good website with some helpful tutorials. Unfortunately for us, they're all in French, though they do provide a link to Google Translate to help us foreigners. This does a decent job, but when things get technical, it can come up short.

Overall, Voyager is an excellent demonstration of what Xfce can do with a

The terminal session also has an unusual, but quite useful, two-line prompt.

little bit of theming. If you're after a good-looking GTK 2 desktop environment, this shows that it can challenge Mate running on Linux Mint. It did feel like all the fancy

add-ons have slowed down Xfce a bit, so it may not be the best distro for a low-power PC, but we didn't find it was too drastic on our test machine.
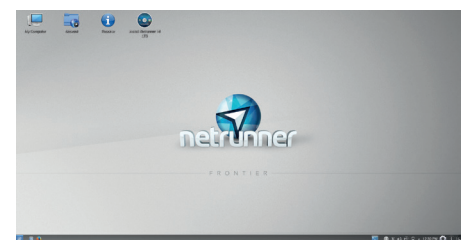
Netrunner 14

One of our favourite KDE distros just got even better.

Blue Systems first hit the headlines in 2012 as a mysterious German company that sponsored Mint KDE, took over Kubuntu, and employed some well known KDE developers. Its first software release was two years before this, though, in 2010 when the first version of Netrunner came out. We now know a little more about Blue Systems. It's run as a philanthropic venture by Clemens Tönnies Jr, a German businessman who inherited a large proportion of a meat processing company.

Netrunner may not be a famous KDE distro, but it certainly comes from an organisation with the resources and talent to make a top-notch distro.

The desktop is heavily themed, and it's this that separates it from Kubuntu, on which the distro is based. In the bottom-left lies a Kicker menu, which feels more like the applications menu from GTK-based distros rather than the more traditional KDE offering. Netrunner also strays from standard KDE by purging the dreaded blue glow behind the active window. This is replaced by a less-offensive grey shadowing. The one thing we weren't keen on is the large icon sizes, which take up an unnecessarily large amount of screen space – but this is easy to fix.

We've been following the development of Netrunner for some time, and it's been

We've tried the Kubuntu-based Netrunner 14, but there's also a version based on Arch Linux.

getting better with each release. Part of this is due to Blue Systems supporting projects that fill in critical gaps in the KDE experience. For example, Muon Discover now brings a great software centre experience to Qt. This provides a much nicer experience than traditional package-based tools.

Netrunner deserves more attention than it's often given. If you're after a well-set up, well-themed KDE distro, it's one of the best.
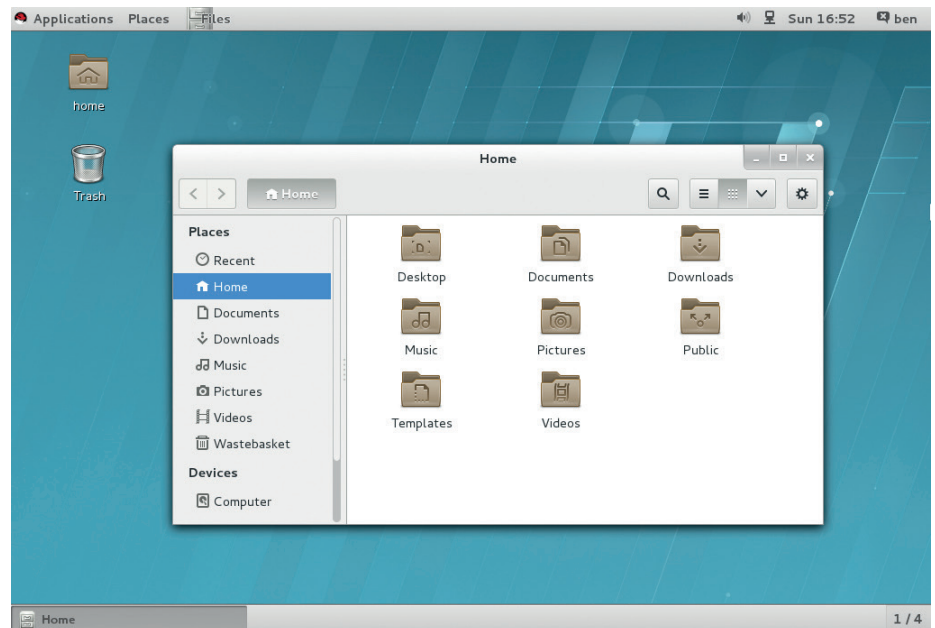
Red Hat Enterprise Linux 7

The number-one enterprise Linux distribution gets a major update.

R ed Hat is a giant of commercial Linux, but few Linux users actually use its Enterprise Linux distribution because of its high licensing fees. However, there's a free 30-day trial version available for those who want to take a tour of the latest version – Red Hat Enterprise Linux 7.

The client (desktop) version comes with the Gnome 3 desktop, but by default, it starts it in classic mode to keep it familiar to Gnome 2 users – Red Hat isn't about to drastically change the look of its premium product, because its entire business is built upon stability and reliability.

Perhaps the biggest surprise for someone coming from other distros is the use of the XFS filesystem. This now supports sizes up to 500TB (yes, that's half a petabyte). BTRFS is available, but the literature describes it as 'young', which may be Red Hat's way of saying they're not ready to trust it yet. Active Directory is now supported, which could ease the load for a few sysadmins.

Of course, Red Hat isn't really about desktop users. It is, at its heart, a server OS. Here, the big news is the support for Docker. Of course, Docker does run on most Linux

The trial version is fun to play with, but without a subscription, you can't access the repositories.

distros, but Red Hat is touting its close partnership with Docker Inc. (the company behind the technology), and is working hard to make RHEL the best platform on which to use it. There are also the usual bundle of

upgrades, which Red Hat claims make the new version 11–25% faster.

The CentOS team are working on the community build, which may even be available by the time you read this.
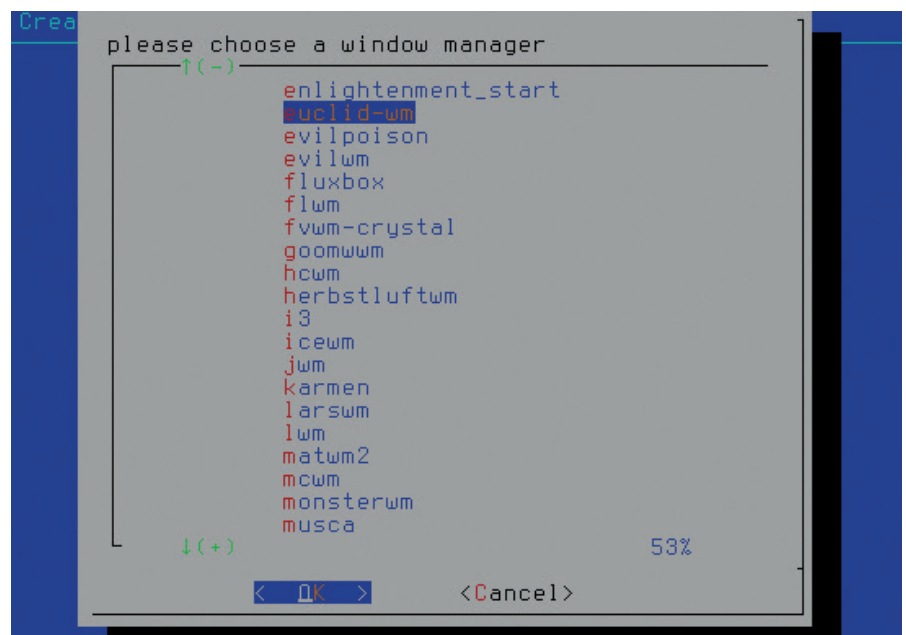

BBQ Linux & Linux BBQ A tale of two distros

These two distros have nothing in common except very similar names.

Linux BBQ is a live distro designed purely to enable you to test out different window managers. In the latest version, there are 76 different window managers ready to try without you needing to install anything. It's a little hard to think of an occasion when you need 76 different window managers, but there is a bit of geek-pleasure to be had from finding exactly the right one for you.

BBQ Linux, on the other hand, is a distribution built for Android developers, so it's got Android Studio, the Android SDK and a host of other apps. According to the project's website, it's got everything you need to build an Android Open Source Project (ASOP) distribution like Cyanogenmod, and it's based on Arch with the Mate window manager.

There are a lot of Linux distributions, but when there are 600,000 words in the Oxford English dictionary, you should be able to find something original for your software. There are, no doubt, some slightly confused phone developers out there wondering why they have to pick a window manager before working on their new app.

Linux BBQ and BBQ Linux provide a salutary warning to aspiring developers: check that the intended name of your project isn't already in use before you release it!